

Torreya - Growing Guide

Growing Torreya

Nutmeg Yew

On a recent gardening tour of southern Irish gardens *Torreya californica* and *Torreya nucifera* were present as mature trees in Fota arboretum and Inacullin gardens. At Caerhays we have struggled to get these slow growing trees away after rabbit damage and the loss of their central leading shoots in strong winds. Nevertheless there are fine trees at Tregothnan, Tresco and Scorrier House near Burncoose.

[Pictures from Irish trip plus Caerhays]

Torreyas are however still fairly rare coniferous trees in cultivation which is surprising when you see their visual impact in a landscape context. They have flattened lance shaped leaves which are yew-like but hard and spine tipped.

T. californica grows eventually to about 50ft with an erect trunk and whorled branches. The egg shaped fruits, from which torreya take their name, are an olive colour streaked with purple. They are 1.5in long and about 1in wide with a fleshy covering over the seed. The 1.5-3in leaves are glossy green above and yellowish-green below.

T. nucifera is more of a shrub growing 10-12ft tall in cultivation but larger in the wild. The young new growth shoots are green initially becoming a shining purple. The dark green leaves are smaller and more curved than *T. californica* and glaucous underneath. The plum like fruits are green and about half the size of those of *T. californica*. They can take two years to ripen.

Seed deteriorates rapidly after ripening so should be sown fresh in a cold frame where it may well take two years to germinate. Growing these

plants from cuttings is possible but the resulting plants tend to be misshapen and require frequent staking to create a leading shoot. Torreyas can also be grafted onto yew but seed grown plants are preferable.

Torreyas will grow in full sun or dappled shade but protection from wind is advisable as we have discovered to our cost.



Torrey californica



Torrey californica



Torrey californica



Torrey californica



Torrey grandis



Torrey grandis



Torrey nucifera



Torrey nucifera



Torrey nucifera



Torrey nucifera



Torrey nucifera



Torrey taxifolia



Torrey taxifolia



Torrey taxifolia



Torrey taxifolia



Torrey taxifolia

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